

PART 723 - 1: INTRODUCTION

The directive to prepare a state plan addressing emergency water supply management responds to the need for a coordinated approach to provide adequate drinking water to citizens of the state at times of a crisis. This initiative also responds to the mandate set forth by the General Assembly under *Rhode Island General Laws*, Section 46-15-14, authorizing the Governor to take action and issue orders as may be necessary to supply safe potable water to the state's inhabitants, and requiring the Division of Planning to assist in plan development.

1-1 JURISDICTIONAL SCOPE OF THE PLAN

This plan serves as a guide in situations severe enough to constitute water supply emergencies, in particular offering guidelines for actions by the state when engaged in emergency water management. While the plan discusses the authority of the state during water emergencies, it in no way limits emergency powers vested in the Governor. The plan establishes responsibilities for responding to the most probable emergencies, and sets out organizational relationships for carrying out efficient and constructive solutions based on an analysis of potential crises and risks.

Declarations of emergency in response to water crises may be adopted on a statewide basis, regionally, or locally. In most cases, primary reliance is on emergency plans developed and implemented by water suppliers. The Water Supply Management Act requires water suppliers to prepare water supply management plans by June 1994. These regulations affect 28 of Rhode Island's larger water suppliers, in accordance with Chapter 46-15.4 of the *General Laws* (1992).

Much of this plan addresses public water systems. These are generally the larger systems, which employ staff to oversee operations. It is recognized, however, that there are approximately 450 private small and very small systems, which by definition serve more than 25 but fewer than 3,300 persons. Short-term failures in these systems may never be municipal or state emergencies, as problems are analogous to piping or plumbing problems that should be considered a part of regular maintenance. The small and very small systems must ensure that they have the resources to secure plumbers or contractors when necessary and to address minor contamination episodes with the purchase of bottled water.

There is a reasonable assumption that municipalities will assist water suppliers with available emergency equipment and supplies when requested. Response, however, will vary dependent on the resources of the community. State assistance may be requested in these incidents but will likely be limited to ensuring safety or health of the population at risk.

The objectives of the Water Emergency Response Plan are to identify the point at which a crisis requires state involvement beyond the usual jurisdictional authority of the supplier or municipality, and to recommend specific actions by state agencies in response to disasters. This plan addresses extraordinary circumstances when coordination is needed between municipalities, interagency services are required, or transportation of water is required beyond the scope or capability of the local supplier.

This plan is not a medical response plan, nor is it a terrorism response plan. While portions of this plan will be valid, this plan was not designed to address these types of incidents. Responders should refer to the State Emergency Operations Plan for guidance in such events.

1-2 TYPES OF EMERGENCIES ADDRESSED

The incidents selected for this plan characterize the most probable emergency situations to occur in Rhode Island and were selected after considering the many causes and effects of disasters that could strike water systems, or pose the highest risk potential to public drinking water supplies. These are hazardous material releases, contamination, mechanical failures, power failures, and water shortages. The responsibility for specific phases of each type of event is explained in duplicate in the narrative and in a detailed flow chart following each section. Each incident is broken down into several phases or levels that increasingly address a higher degree of crisis.

1-3 PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Planning for emergencies before they happen will not forestall the event or its occurrence interval, but it will enable a more efficient response and in turn help to maintain drinking water quantity, as well as quality. Implementing efficient and effective emergency response plans guarantees a mechanism for providing direction and oversight to ensure that desired results are attained in a timely manner by personnel who understand their roles and responsibilities.

The goals of this plan are, by determining actions to be taken at various stages of a water emergency to assure:

- protection of public health, safety, and welfare;
- conservation of essential drinking water resources;
- the reasonable allocation of supply; and
- support of essential and high priority uses.

The state Water Emergency Response Plan will:

- A. Establish parameters for involvement in water emergencies.
- B. Identify courses of action in the most probable types of water emergency.
- C. Define responsibility and determine levels where state action is appropriate.
- D. Describe communication responsibilities and procedures among state agencies, water suppliers, and other entities so that public communication during emergency situations is accomplished in a timely and efficient manner.
- E. Define common terminology used during water emergencies.

This statewide emergency plan is not designed for responding to every conceivable contingency, but it highlights the major potential risks to water supplies in Rhode Island. This plan offers guidelines for responding to particular water crises and, used as a model, will mitigate confusion surrounding emergency situations.

1-4 ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

The *Water Emergency Response Plan* explores many facets of emergency response which may confront the state, and presents conclusions as to how they could be dealt with more effectively. This plan represents but one element of the State Guide Plan and addresses short-term, temporary water emergencies affecting large and small public systems. Additional elements of the State Guide Plan deal with other aspects of water resource development, water supply management, and drought management.

This plan is arranged in six major parts. Part 1 introduces the purpose and the types of emergencies addressed within the scope of the plan. Part 2 discusses the historical perspective and present direction of emergency response planning, and future planning considerations for Rhode Island. Responsibilities of state and federal agencies involved in emergency response are briefly described in Part 3.

Part 4 embodies the operational aspect of this plan and the five risk elements discussed; each structured in several levels that relate to the extent of the emergency situation. As an incident meets the criteria of a subsequent emergency level, response is heightened and focused to meet the needs of the situation. Responsibility for each risk element for every level of response is outlined naming each of the responding agencies and their roles. A flow chart, indicating the organizational structure of the response team, follows the discussion of each level.

Media communications and public information necessary in emergency situations are addressed in Part 5. Recommended actions for the state and municipalities are discussed in Part 6. The plan contains six appendices labeled A through F. Readers are referred to each within the context of the plan including definitions of terms in Appendix B provided as a general reference for the document.